

mic work

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Joe Bustillos
COMM201 - December 9, 1987
Speaker, Lynne Gross - "Investigative Journalism" in Malaysia

Then isn't the lead almost a year old?

[Communications professor Lynne Gross went to Malaysia last January to teach a one-month course on investigative reporting to the country's broadcast personnel. Gross told Cal State Fullerton students yesterday that, if invited, she'd go back in a minute. But she added that teaching investigative reporting in Malaysia was little more than "window dressing." Anyone attempting investigative reporting "would get fired instantly," she said.

good background

[Two of the three television stations in Malaysia are government-owned and are little more than "arms of the government," according to Gross. The third station must maintain a permit with the government to broadcast.

[Malaysian news broadcasts contain very little hard news and are delivered by "news readers" who do not gather their own stories, according to Gross. The news readers receive typical civil service pay and are held in less social esteem than the country's farmers, she said. "They make no pretense that these people are reporters." She demonstrated her point by showing a video tape of a half hour news broadcast.

Half of the broadcast consisted of footage of the Prime Minister's latest meeting, his wife visiting a children's hospital and the prayer schedules of the King and Queen. The other half consisted of a brief weather report and highlights culled from a satellite feed of a soccer match held in Mexico

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that didn't involve a Malaysian team.

good background
(Gross said ~~that~~ the country's two major daily newspapers, New Strait Times and The Malaysia Mail, follow the same light news format. She said that they have a "peculiar" habit of leaving information out of their news stories. For example, one of the papers ran a story on a group of parents who were keeping their children out of a particular school. The paper carried the story for several days, listing the parents' names and addresses. "But," she said, "they never explained why the parents were keeping their kids out of school." She later found out, through other sources, that the school's instructor had not voted for the "right" candidate in the last election.

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Malaysia produces 60 percent of ~~their~~ own entertainment programs, Gross said. One popular program, "Sophia," is a sitcom that takes place in a unisex hair salon and follows a formula similar to the US TV program, "Cheers." Unlike "Cheers," Malaysian programs are required to end with some positive social message (pro-government). One station ran the US series, "Dallas." But because of the country's ban on showing people kissing on-screen (Malaysia is a moslem country) they had to cut too much of the program for it to be understandable.

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